



Coalition

Scimitar

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SecDef visits

Sees vast improvements in Iraq's self defense ability

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Ken Hudson
319th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld, U.S. Secretary of Defense, visited Iraq in early December, his third visit since the end of major combat operations here.

Mr. Rumsfeld's appraisal of the situation in Iraq was very favorable. He emphasized that progress is being made in training new Iraqi defense and security forces, stating that there are now more of them than there are Americans serving in Iraq. "They are, I believe, at this stage almost larger than all the Coalition forces combined."

Mr. Rumsfeld praised the progress in training and deploying the different branches of Iraqi civil defense. According to the defense secretary, there are more than 140,000 Iraqis now serving in their nation's defenses, whether in the border patrol,

police, site protection, civil defense or the new Iraqi Army. Replying to media questions about the recent apparent decline in attacks against Coalition members, Mr. Rumsfeld said it's too early to tell if that's a clear trend, but said it is a good sign.

"I do know we've got a lot of wonderfully talented people doing a very fine job out here and they deserve an awful lot of credit," he said. The defense secretary used almost every opportunity to stress his belief that the Iraqi people are taking the reins of security and defense of their coun-

try into their own grasp.

He said it may be in his nature to expedite the

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Photo by Tech. Sgt. Andy Dunaway/USAF

Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld is briefed on the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps training by Army Sgt. Kearney.

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Paratroopers host combined U.S., Iraqi holiday party for orphans
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Photo courtesy of Headquarters (Multi National Division) South East

Italian troops seek out weapons

During the night of the 6th of December, Italian Task Force Dimonios conducted Operation CLEAR AREA in the zone between Al Riffa'l and qal At-Sukkar. Units of the Savoia cavalry, marines of S.Marco battalion and Lagunari troops operated vehicle check points and conducted extensive searches.

The operation proffered many automatic weapons. Thanks to intelligence provided by the local people, a

hidden depot containing a huge quantity of weapons, ammunition and explosives was discovered. The cache included: 151 RPGs rocket launcher; 53 PG-7 rockets; 38 PG-9 rockets; one PG-5 rocket; one mortar bomb 82 mm; 300 kilos of explosive.

In addition, throughout the operation, 13 mortar bombs (82 mm), six mortar bombs (60 mm) and six munitions (37 mm) were confiscated.

Off with his head



Photo by Senior Airman Brent Skeen/AFN-Iraq

Workers use a crane to lift off the first of four bronze heads from the roof of the Presidential Palace in Baghdad Dec. 2. Removing the heads modeled after Saddam Hussein's visage was just the latest visual symbol of the end of Saddam's rein in Iraq. Media from throughout the world gathered below in the palace drive to witness the event and report it to the world. The other three heads were removed last week. A special heavy-duty crane had to be used to lift the heads from their posts.

Road to recovery

Trucking business opens, hauls materials in Al Anbar

Story by Cpl. Vernon O'Donnell
350th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

HABBANIYAH — To combat unemployment and help with economic recovery in the region, the Al Anbar Trucking Initiative officially began at Forward Operating Base Ridgeway Dec. 2, signaling a new era of increased economic solidarity between Coalition soldiers and the people of Al Anbar Province.

"The initiative will provide economic revitalization throughout Al Anbar by pumping money back into the economy," said Maj. Ed Box, 82nd Airborne Division rear intelligence officer. Box was one of the organizers of the project along with Maj. Mike Magee, effects coordinator, and Capt. Jason Thomas, an officer with the division transportation office.

After the preliminary planning, Maj. Gen. Charles H. Swannack Jr., commander of the 82nd, met with Sheik Ali Suleiman, sheik of sheiks for the province.

They determined that all drivers for the project would come from Al Anbar. According to Taha Affat Hamadi, the local foreman for the company, this was decided for two reasons.

"They (the local drivers) know the roads better and that will make deliveries easier and, also, the drivers need the jobs because the job market is bad," said Hamadi.

The first day of the new initiative saw 10 trucks come to FOB Ridgeway to pick up materials to be hauled throughout the region.

"The goal is for these drivers to haul a bulk of our supplies and to ultimately help our division with redeployment next year," said Box. "And once we leave, this company will fall in on the Marines so the business will continue long after the 82nd is gone."

Eventually, the plan calls for the drivers to begin transporting water, containers, lubricants, oil, barrier materials and provisions for economic development. There will be more than 100 trucks driving daily and there will be approximately 800 Al Anbar locals employed across the province from the initiative.

"As this plan progresses, it is going to take on a life of its own," said Thomas who works in the movement control office. "So, as it grows and needs more trucks and drivers, we will expand accordingly."

The Al Anbar Trucking Initiative will not only help the local economy; organizers say they expect that it will also help instill pride in the people of Al Anbar as more of them become employed and as they see their fellow Iraqis providing defense for their businesses.

"This is a great opportunity to improve our living conditions and our local economy, and later on it is going to be a big, big business that will help many people in Al Anbar," said Hamadi.

Iraqi Dinar swap continues; 50 billion changed so far

Story by Pfc. J. H. French
40th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

AR RAMADI — Almost 50 billion Dinars have been exchanged for the new Iraqi currency in six weeks.

The people of Iraq began to exchange the old "Saddam" Dinars and Swiss National Dinars for the new national currency, the Iraqi Dinar, at banks and other officially designated areas around the country Oct. 15.

The Iraqi Ministry of Finance approved the mint of a new Iraqi currency that will no longer depict Saddam Hussein's image. Instead, the new Dinar will be a representation of Iraq's long history and its new future.

Having a single currency should improve economic conditions in the new Iraq. A unified, official

currency will improve business and trade. It will also make the every day transactions for business faster and easier as prices become standardized.

An initial concern for the Coalition Provisional Authority, who is in charge of the exchange, was that everyone would rush to the banks to make the exchange in fear of a monetary shortage.

"So far, everything has been going fairly smoothly. There haven't been any long lines at the banks," said Maj. Gottfried H. Koblitz, commander of the 432nd Civil Affairs Battalion from Green Bay, Wis. "Our hope now is that everyone isn't waiting until the last minute to make the exchange."

The deadline for making the currency exchange is Jan. 15. After the deadline, the old Dinars will no longer be used.

The destruction of the Saddam-adorned money is a sign his regime is over and a new democratic organization will take its place.



A worker dips old "Saddam" Dinar in red dye to indicate the money has been exchanged for the new Dinars.

Unsung Heroes

Marching the extra mile across Iraq



Sher Bahadur Rai

Sher Bahadur Rai works as the regimental quartermaster sergeant for the Gurkha Force Protection battalion, overseeing the provision of logistical concerns for the Nepalese guards. He is responsible for the issuing of uniforms and equipment worn by the guards. Sher has served in other Gulf countries and said, "Iraq's weather is milder than some I have seen."

In his off-duty time, Sher says he rests, relaxes and enjoys preparing meals in the battalion's kitchen. His fellow Gurkhas tease Sher because he forgot to issue boots to himself when he deployed.



Tej Bahadur Pun

Tej Bahadur Pun said he was watching reports of weapons inspectors in Iraq on his television back home in Nepal and never dreamed he would one day be serving in Baghdad.

"Now, I guard the Presidential Palace, and have watched the heads of Saddam come down," said Pun.

Pun emphasized he is proud to serve as part of the Coalition in the reconstruction of Iraq, but that his greatest pride is in serving along the Tigris river, "where my forefathers fought with great distinction during second world war. This is in my mind always," he said.



Ram Kumar Limbu

Ram Kumar Limbu has observed great changes in Iraq since he first arrived in July. He comes from the area of Nepal near to Mount Everest where the climate is cool and damp. He said when he visited Mosul he was particularly impressed with how much the north of Iraq resembles his home. Baghdad, on the other hand is considerably warmer and drier, however.

More has changed in Iraq since July than just the seasons, however, and Limbu said that he takes pride in being a part the effort to rebuild and bring peace and stability to the people of Iraq.



Dea Shamsheer Tamang

Dea Shamsheer Tamang, a logistical supervisor for the battalion-sized Gurkha security force recalls that as a child, he read the story of *Ali Babba and the 40 Thieves*. As a man, Tamang says the Iraq he sees is, "not at all like the story I read," he said. At this he enjoys a hearty laugh.

Tamang was in Iraq during major combat operations and has witnessed, "significant progress in the reconstruction of the country." He said he considers it a "great privilege to be a part of the Coalition, to support the security of its members and to witness the rebuilding of Iraq."

Peaceful warriors, former Gurkhas serve Coalition

By Sgt. 1st Class Ken Hudson

319th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BAGHDAD — When British forces attempted to invade Nepal in the early 1800s, they were surprised by the tenacity and fighting spirit of the soldiers determined to defend the tiny nation bordering India to the east. The Gurkhas, it is said, fought back with stones and repelled the invading forces. After a peace agreement was reached, the British and Nepalese people formed a friendship that endures some 200 years later.

Now, Gurkha soldiers serve beside British soldiers around the world as part of the Royal Army.

Some 430 Nepalese, retired from the service as Gurkhas, contribute to the peace, security and reconstruction mission in Iraq as part of Global Force Protection, a privately contracted guard force. Gurkhas are disbursed to locations throughout Iraq from north to south. In Mosul they are responsible for oilfield security. In Baghdad they guard several places of critical importance: the Presidential Palace, the Governing Council building, and the Al Rasheed Hotel, among them.

"Two of our soldiers were injured in the attack on the Al Rasheed," said Dea S. Tamang, a logistical supervisor for the battalion-sized Gurkha security force. "One of the injured is still in the hospital in Kuwait undergoing treatment for damaged hearing," he said.

On Oct. 26, the Al Rasheed hotel was attacked by Iraqi insurgents. That attack resulted in the death of one American soldier and serious injury to four other people.

Operation Iraqi Freedom is not the first time British and Gurkha soldiers have operated together on Iraqi soil. Tej B. Pun, a communications specialist with Global, says he feels a deep sense of pride in serving in Baghdad where his forefathers fought during World War II. One Gurkha battalion still observes Tigris Day in commemoration of actions its soldiers took and losses they suffered in fighting on the Tigris River. "Twenty-six Gurkha soldiers were awarded the Victoria Cross for their service in that campaign," said Pun. The Victoria Cross is Britain's highest award for military service.

According to Mr. James Pettigrew, adjutant of

the Gurkha battalion in Iraq, as line infantry units go, the Gurkhas, "are the highest standard you can get." Pettigrew spent some years as a British Army officer and was a platoon leader in a Gurkha rifle company.

Although duty as a Gurkha is rigorous, there is no shortage of applicants to serve in it. Some 57 thousand Nepalese volunteer to serve in the elite corps every year. Of that number, only 200 are selected, said Pettigrew. "They are used to life in a harsh environment — tough, mountainous terrain, living and working at 5,000 meters above sea level," he said. The Gurkha tradition of dedication to a task is seen daily throughout Iraq, according to Pettigrew. "We ask 45-year-old men to stand 12-hour guard shifts and they don't think twice about it," he said.

"Nepalese people are warm and welcoming," said Tamang. Most of the country is in its original, natural condition. There are places in the mountainous region, "where never have humans set foot," he said. The Nepalese people are peace-loving and gentle. "In our tradition, visitors to our country are treated as guests," said Tamang.

Iraq in Briefs

Paratroopers capture insurgents, seize weapons

BAGHDAD — Paratroopers from the Task Force 1st Armored Division 2nd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division captured a man suspected of planning attacks against coalition forces during a series of raids Dec. 2.

The "Blue Falcons" of 3rd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, captured the suspect in southern Baghdad at about 2:30 p.m. Along with the suspect, soldiers seized 13 60 mm high-explosive shells, six rocket-propelled grenades, 30 grenade fuses, five hand grenades, three 82 mm mortar tubes and a 100 blocks of explosives.

In a later raid shortly afterward, soldiers captured a suspected weapons dealer. The suspect had five rocket-propelled grenade rounds.

At about 5 p.m., the Blue Falcons conducted a third raid. They detained six suspected insurgents. They also seized two AK-47 assault rifles, a 60 mm mortar round and five rocket-propelled grenade rounds.

Operation Bayonet Lightning complete

KIRKUK — In a joint operation with Iraqi security forces the 173rd Airborne Brigade, part of Task Force Ironhorse, under the command of 4th Infantry Division commanding general, Maj. Gen. Raymond Odierno, completed Operation Bayonet Lightning.

This was a cooperative brigade-wide operation, capitalizing on the successful joint patrols conducted by 173rd soldiers, Iraqi Civil Defense Corps and the Iraqi Police. Twenty-six individuals were captured, including three targeted individuals. All of the captured are suspected of being members of Fedayeen Saddam.

Member of former regime captured

AL FALLUJAH — Paratroopers from 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, conducted a cordon and search mission Dec. 3 to capture former regime elements in Fallujah.

Soldiers detained Brig. Gen. Daham Al Mahemdi during this operation. At his home, two AK-47s, five AK-47 magazines, a 9mm pistol, a 9mm pistol magazine, a shotgun, one 100 round drum of ammunition and assorted documents, including a photograph of Mahemdi in an Iraqi Army uniform, were found.

Mahemdi was a Republican Guard Colonel of the Habbaniyah Lakes region and promoted to general immediately before the war by Saddam Hussein. He is suspected of having indirect contact with Saddam Hussein and directing anti-coalition activities in Fallujah.

Teamwork

Iraqis, US troops build airport

Story by Spc.

Joshua Hutcheson

40th Public Affairs Detachment

MOSUL — A ribbon cutting ceremony was held recently to celebrate the completion of the 101st Airborne Division's involvement in renovations of the Hawler International Airport in Erbil.

High-ranking members of the Kurdish Regional Government attended the ceremony.

Maj. Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), and other leaders from the division attended the ceremony.

The construction at the airfield was a four-month project, undertaken jointly by civilian engineers and construction workers, Kurdish Peshmerga Special Forces and soldiers from four engineer units — the 37th Engineer Battalion, 926th Engineer Group, 877th Engineer Battalion and 52nd Engineer Battalion, all of which are attached to the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault).

"This is a joint triumph," Petraeus said. "(The soldiers) and their Kurdish partners have been the key to this endeavor."

"I would like to thank all the (people) who worked on this

project," said Prime Minister Barzani. "The soldiers who worked here will have a special place in our hearts and minds."

The work at the airport was divided into three major projects, all conducted simultaneously.

The first project was the construction of a three-kilometer ring road to connect the airport to high-traffic roads. Its function is to provide expanded access to the airport and serve as a gate to commercial development on the northwest side of the city, said Maj. Benjamin Bigelow, operations officer with the 37th.

The second project was the construction of an 18-kilometer perimeter road around the entire airport property. The third project was the expansion and improvement of a cargo parking apron accessed by two taxiways, Bigelow said.

To give back to the Kurds who helped fight along side Coalition forces during Operation Iraqi Freedom, the military engineers worked long hours in the heat, rain and cold to build roads for the airport, said Capt. Jason Talliaferro, commander of Company C, 37th Engineer Battalion.

Barzani hopes that by creating an international airport in

Hawler, he will be able to improve the economy through tourism, exporting and importing goods and jobs.

"It's a great way to get tourists to Kurdistan," he said. "It's a gate for this region."

Erbil is the biggest city in Kurdistan, with a population of one and a half million. Plus, its location is central to most of the large cities in northern Iraq, he said.

"The expansion of Hawler International Airport will open a door for this region to the rest of the world," Petraeus said.

Both Coalition forces and the Kurdish government supplied the equipment used to work on the project.

"This was our first road project," said Spc. Sean Bailey, a combat engineer with C Co. 37th Eng. Bn. "It just shows you the versatility of the engineers."

There are other projects that need to be completed before the airport will be open for business. Fences need to be built around the ring road and the rest of the airfield and a traffic control tower also needs to be built.

The soldiers of the 37th Eng. Bn. enjoyed working in Erbil.

"It's nice to see a community that really appreciates our help," Talliaferro said.

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turnover of sovereignty to Iraqi citizens.

"I'd like to see us continue to accelerate the training and recruiting and deployment of Iraqi security forces," said Mr. Rumsfeld. "And the people in our armed forces that are doing a vast amount of the training are doing it very well."

"But I'm constantly trying to find ways to increase the pace," he said.

Recent increases in volume and reliability of

intelligence are due, said to Mr. Rumsfeld, to the Iraqi people being more engaged in their nation's security activities.

"They know the language, the neighborhood and things that ought not to be, and they are coming forward with information that's improving the Coalition's ability to aggressively weed out the remnants of the Saddam Hussein regime," said Mr. Rumsfeld.

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